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Lauren Speeth Sermon “Food Waste Weekend!”

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21 - Jesus Feeds the 5,000

September 8, 2017

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

This weekend is Food Waste Weekend. It’s a beautiful way to join hands with our neighbors across the country of many walks of faith, and with atheists and agnostics, all of us who stand as one, seeking first God’s kingdom, by whatever name they know it. That’s my topic this evening.

Loaves and fishes. Did you like that little song? We wrote it for children. It’s part of a free little app called Pastor Fish. When children hear a Pastor Fish tell that story, we have the Pastor - who is a fish - get confused about Jesus serving up five loaves and a couple of fishes as food. But there’s nothing confusing about that story itself unless we make it so. It’s a story about blessing. And, it’s so beautiful, I never tire of listening to it.

When I was learning about ministry I was taught to ask a question that informed my actions. No, it’s not “what would Jesus do?” like on the jewelry. The question is “what did Jesus do?” Because asking what He DID do, instead of imagining what he might do, keeps us from guessing wrong, from being limited by what we can imagine. If we were fish swimming in purple-tinted waters, everything we imagined would be purple, and we’d hardly notice. Jesus transcended the waters we swim in, so it’s good to look to what He did do, not what we conjure up. And yes, there’s usually a parallel we can find, if we look deeply with teachable eyes.

In our reading, from the Gospel of Matthew (14:13-21), even after Our Lord tried to slip away by boat to a remote location, the people had simply gone around the lake to him. He saw their need for healing and had pity on them. It grew late, and the disciples, not imagining there could be an abundance, asked him to dismiss the crowd so they could go eat. Jesus’ response? You feed them, yourselves. It wasn’t much, but when brought before Jesus and blessed, it was enough. What began as five loaves and two fishes fed 5,000 men plus women and kids. The disciples must have been over the moon, delighted. Sitting there, stuffed, they could hardly expect what was asked of them next.

Jesus told the disciples to collect what remained. Imagine that! What were they to think about that? God makes it rain abundance, and he cares about the table scraps? Yes, in this undeniable example of supernatural and overflowing abundance, Jesus still cared about waste. Jesus taught them – teaches us – by that action, that nothing should be wasted. Waste not. Isn’t that beautiful?



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If we were to follow this action, much of the 2.9 trillion tons of food that gets wasted every year would make it to the mouths of the hungry. Those 800 million who suffer from hunger daily – those 21,000 who die daily (one every four seconds) might not die. Did you know that it's been shown that there's more than enough healthy food to feed everyone? That we throw enough food out daily, here in the USA, to fill the Rose Bowl? That the average family wastes 1,000 pounds of food a year? I didn't either, until I got involved with ampleharvest.org's food waste weekend project as a member of the 2017 Steering Committee. I'm glad I did, because it got me thinking.

It got me thinking about how food waste intersects with the climate crisis... with better food husbandry, fuel and water could be saved. Same for tractor fuel, jars and cans, and plastic bags. Oh, and all that irrigation. Listen to this one: National Geographic says the energy alone that goes into the production, harvest transport and so on of the wasted food generates over 3.3B metric tons of carbon dioxide. If food waste were a country, it'd be the world's 3rd largest greenhouse gas pig. Who knew!

Remember that Joni Mitchell song about the Big Yellow Taxi, pleading with the farmer to put away the DDT... she sang "spots on my apples but leave me the birds and the bees." But I confess I do find myself picking the spotless apple, the straightest carrot. We already donate our after-event food so that's good, but I don't always bring home my leftovers, and when I do, they often end in the bin, anyway. As I prepared this sermon, I thought about the wilted triple-washed spinach salad I bought, only to discover I already had some. Will the old bag go to waste? If my history is an indicator, it would. But repentance is a first step.

The other beauty of this story is that Jesus taught us how we, ourselves, are key. Jesus didn't collect the baskets back, Himself. He asked for this to happen. He is asking us. He asks even those who are overflowing in abundance to remember their table scraps, because they are important. If they were important to Jesus, they should be important to us, His followers.

So... what can we do? It varies for everyone. But here are some steps I'm going to take. I'm going to pray on it. I'm going to check the fridge before I hit the store. I'm going to intentionally consider the weird-shaped fruit that I know is perfectly fine but someone else might not choose. And I'm going to keep an eye on my garden, to make sure I pick everything and get it to Call Primrose Food Pantry before any of it goes off.

Do you have other fun ideas? If you do, I invite you to share them with me, and I'll share them on Elfenworks' social media outlets. I like to say "never underestimate your ripple." This could be one great big wave of hope for the hungry. I'm excited to take part, following the example of Jesus and His disciples, all those centuries ago. And all the people say... Amen.

